

Colossians 2:4-5

PREFACE

For the first nine months of our marriage, in 1971, Linda and I lived in a tiny apartment that had originally been a one-car garage. Our rent was ninety dollars per month. Living on seaman's pay, that was all we could afford. Dinners were macaroni and cheese; entertainment was walking to the local library.

One day when Linda was not home, to this modest domicile came knocking a *Kirby* vacuum cleaner salesman. And, because I was, at the time, a young idiot, I let him in and listened attentively to his spiel. By the time he left, I was convinced that I *must* purchase this extraordinary machine for my wife. No matter that it cost several hundred dollars. No matter that our dwelling was so small you could stand anywhere in it and see all four walls of the other rooms. No, I *had* to get this for my wife.

Happily, the young woman I married has *never* been an idiot. When she returned home she patiently educated me on the basics of economics, budgets, and folly. I am pleased to report that her reasonable argument won out over the persuasive patter of the salesman, and we never purchased that vacuum cleaner.

True Knowledge

In our last session the apostle Paul expressed his earnest desire for the Colossians. He told them that he “agonized” over them in his prayers, that they would realize that all the wisdom and knowledge and understanding they would ever need could be found in Christ.

Read Colossians 2:1-3.

Our passage for today begins with Paul's reason for expressing all that.

Read Colossians 2:4-5.

v4

Last week one of the words in our text was *thesauros*, from which we get the English word *thesaurus*—a treasury of words. Well, in v4, the translators have leafed through their respective thesauri to come up a plethora of English words with which to translate the two key words in this verse.

delude^{nasb, esv}, **deceive**^{nkjv, niv}, **beguile**^{kjv} = *paralogizomai* = from <G3844> (para) and <G3049> (logizomai); **to misreckon**, i.e. delude :- beguile, deceive; to miscalculate, **to reason falsely**. [Vaughan: “leading astray by false reasoning”]

The other word is translated with two words in the NASB: “persuasive argument.”

persuasive argument^{nasb}

persuasive words^{nkjv}

enticing words^{kjv}

fine-sounding arguments^{niv}

plausible arguments^{esv}

beguiling speech^{rsv}

specious arguments^{nab}

pithanologia (pith-an-o-lo-gee'-ah)

from a compound of a derivative of <G3982> (peitho) and <G3056> (logos); persuasive language : -enticing words. [Lightfoot: "persuasive rhetoric"; Vaughan: "implies the attempt to convince someone by 'fast talk,' or by handing him a 'smooth line'."]]

I like the ESV's "plausible arguments." [story of performance as Satan's voice]

Satan does not present himself as a monster; his minions do not tempt us with brutality. They tempt us away from the path of Christ with sweet talk, with fine-sounding words and utterly "plausible arguments."

Read 2 Corinthians 11:13-15.

That vacuum cleaner salesman in 1971 used "beguiling speech" on a nineteen-year-old rube. He may not have lied outright, but he used a "smooth line" and "fast talk" to persuade someone who could obviously ill-afford his product to one end: his own profit. Just so the Gnostics in Colossae.

This is why it is so important to be familiar with the God of the Bible through His printed word. "Fine-sounding arguments" and "persuasive words" find no purchase in the life of a person who knows and lives by God's word.

It is also why it is so important to be part of a local body. The plain truth is that we cannot do it on our own. Paul's argument is presented in the context of a supportive, edifying family of fellow believers, all "knit together in love" (v2). It is not always necessary to have organized opposition from without; we can also be led astray by the "persuasive arguments" of our own ignorance.

As Solomon writes in Proverbs 27:17,

As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another.

We all need the "sharpening" that comes from pastors, elders, deacons, teachers, brothers and sisters in the church—even as we sharpen them. The church is a marvelous and highly effective invention of God's. It works.

v5

In v5, immediately after the warning of v4, as a good counselor Paul affirms in the Colossians something they are doing right.

Read v5.

One gets the impression that the Holy Spirit was to the apostle something more than just some vaporous, mystical, incorporeal spook. One also gets the impression that Paul chooses his words carefully—and means what he says. Paul saw, in the Spirit, the capacity to supernaturally bond *his* spirit to others. It is this other-worldly ability (in Christ) that gives him the authority to both rebuke, to warn (v4), and affirm (v5) those far away from his “body” (*sarx*).

And Paul does not say this lightly; he is not saying, as many mindlessly do today, “Hey, I’m with you, buddy. You’re in my thoughts and prayers.” No, he really means, *I am **with** you. I am there in your midst*. This is demonstrated even more in what Paul wrote to the Corinthians about a member of their congregation sleeping with his step-mother.

Read 1 Corinthians 5:3-5.

In *Stargate SG-1*, the science fiction series we like so much, they occasionally use a holographic technology that lets a person in one place, appear and even have a conversation with people in another place. He or she is not really there, yet they can interact—hear and speak with others—as if they were.

Although he would never imagine it in such fantastical terms, I believe this is how Paul saw his long-distance interaction with the various churches under his counsel. In this declaration—“I am with you in spirit”—he exhibits for the church the incredible power of the *Holy* Spirit working in and through the body of believers. (Isn’t it interesting that he writes “to see your,” rather than to “hear of your.”)

And just how does he affirm them “in spirit”?

...rejoicing to see your good discipline and the stability of your faith in Christ.

Although the two key words in this phrase were used in military settings, they were also used in more general contexts.

good discipline^{nasb}, **good order**^{kjvs}, **orderly**^{niv} = taxis (tocks’-iss) = from <G5021> (tasso); **regular arrangement**, i.e. (in time) fixed succession (of rank or character), official dignity :- order.

Paul uses this word when he instructs the Corinthians that their assemblies are to be conducted “properly and in an orderly manner” (1 Corinthians 14:40). A good illustration of what this word means (without using the word itself) is found in 1 Corinthians.

Read 1 Corinthians 11:2-3.

stability^{nasb}, **steadfastness**^{kjvs}, **firm(ness)**^{niv,esv} = *stereoma* (ster-eh’-oh-mah) = from <G4732> (stereo); **something established**, i.e. (abstract) confirmation (stability) :- steadfastness.

Reading this verse, we might rightly ask, “If this is the case, why all the concern in the other passages that they not be ‘deluded with persuasive argument’? Which is it?”

Here is how Douglas J. Moo answers this:

The language he uses later in this chapter suggests that the false teaching is something to be resisted, not something that has already infected the church. The Colossian Christians have started well (1:7-8), and they are continuing well. It is the future for which Paul is concerned. As [W.] Wink puts it, **"The epistle is a vaccination against heresy, not an antibiotic for those already afflicted."**

We might rightly be of the opinion that *our* church would stand strong against heretical teaching, false doctrine. But, as Paul states in v4, such things can sound at first perfectly agreeable. We—both the individual and the corporate body of Christ—must always stand guard—in firm, orderly fashion—against such things.